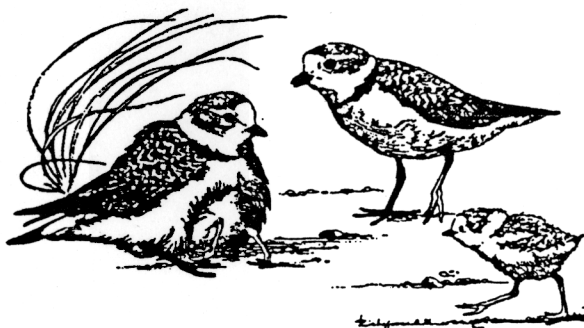


PIPING PLOVER

Charadrius melodus



Official Status: Threatened

Threatened species are species that are likely to become endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

Listed: 50 Federal Register 50733; December 11, 1985.

Historical Status: It appears that the piping plover was more widespread than its present distribution. This may be especially true for the Great Lakes population. Historically, there are breeding records for 21 South Dakota counties.

Present Status: There are three distinct piping plover populations in North America. They are the Atlantic Coast, Great Lakes, and Great Plains populations. A 1991 international census estimated a total piping plover population of 2,337 breeding pairs. Data on wintering sites and migratory routes are sparse, although it seems that the majority of the birds winter on southern Atlantic coastal beaches, along the Gulf of Mexico, and on scattered Caribbean islands. The Great Plains population is comprised of the states of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, Iowa, Colorado, Minnesota, and the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. The estimated number of breeding pairs in this population was 1,372 in 1991. The South Dakota population was estimated at 141 breeding pairs in 1991. The South Dakota pairs were found primarily along the Missouri River, while one pair was found on Lake Thompson in Kingsbury County. The South Dakota population appears to winter primarily along the Gulf of Mexico.

Habitat: In the Great Plains, piping plovers utilize the barren sand and gravel shores of rivers and lakes. Plovers avoid areas with dense vegetation. Generally speaking, the wetlands used by plovers in South Dakota are saline in nature and have salt-encrusted, white beaches. The selection of alkaline lakes is probably a consequence of the sparse vegetation around these lakes. Beaches used by piping plovers will generally average 30 yards in width. Piping plovers also utilize barren river sandbars. In South Dakota, this habitat type is found on the Missouri River.

Life History: The breeding season in South Dakota extends from late April until August. Pairs remain mated for the duration of the breeding season. Pairs are territorial, which means they defend their nest area from other plovers. Both sexes share the incubation duties, which last from 25 to 31 days. A four-egg clutch is laid in a shallow depression in the sand/gravel substrate. Plover chicks are able to walk and feed within hours of hatching. The chicks can fly in about 21 days. Piping plovers feed on insects, crustaceans, and mollusks.

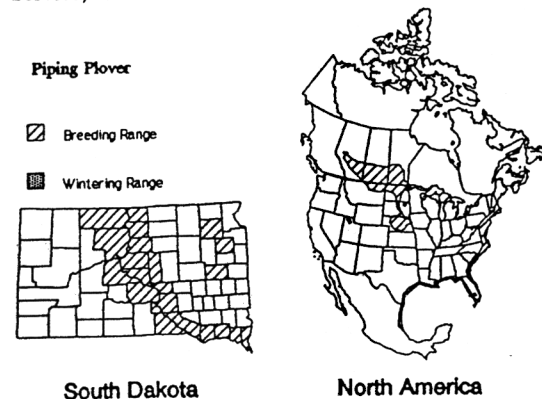
Aid To Identification: The piping plover is a small shorebird the color of dry sand. Distinctive markings include a black band on top of the head and another across the breast. The similar killdeer has two black breastbands. The black bands are not well formed in juvenile piping plovers and in birds in winter plumage. Piping plovers have a melodic flute-like call.

Reasons For Decline: Habitat destruction is a major reason for the population decline. In South Dakota, the construction of reservoirs on the Missouri River has resulted in a loss of sandbar habitat. Plovers utilizing the remaining sandbars on the Missouri River are susceptible to human activities, predation, and water fluctuations as the result of dam operations. Plovers that use alkaline wetlands are susceptible to cattle trampling, wetland drainage, and contaminants.

Recommendations: Avoid Missouri River sandbars and alkaline wetlands that have piping plovers present. Leave the area immediately if piping plovers are observed. Advise others to do likewise. Restrain pets when near piping plovers. Notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (605) 224-8693, or the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, (605) 773-4345, immediately.

Comments: Piping plovers on river sandbars often share the sandbars with least terns, an endangered species. Piping plovers in the Great Lakes watershed are listed endangered.

References: *Great Lakes & Northern Great Plains Piping Plover Recovery Plan* by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1988.



South Dakota

North America

Present distribution of the piping plover.

• 1993 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Pierre, South Dakota